

# ACTS AND ENTR'ACTES

BY KATRINA TRASK

"It is like a pilgrimage; isn't it, Max?"  
"With this advantage," he answered—"one's saint walks beside one towards the shrine."

"Don't be flippant."

"I assure you, nothing was further from my thought. Look at me, Dorothy. No—turning your head is not looking—lift your eyes—so, sweetheart. Do I look flippant?"

Whatever he looked, she felt it was safe for her to turn away again as quickly as possible. They were walking with a throng of people up the hill at Baireuth, and were too surrounded on every side for betrayal of crimson cheeks and tell-tale eyes. Why was it that Max Reynolds could always rouse this tide in her when he chose? She rebelled against it—and loved it. He was the direct antithesis of her schoolgirl picture. She had lived in a realm of poetry and romance, defying the order of the life in which she moved. In her maiden heart she held a shadowy vision of some Lohengrin sailing from unknown spheres to prove that love was still a mystic wonder. She had dreamed of being caught into a splendor of warmth and color, and "light that never was on sea or land"; and while she was waiting, this quiet man with the calm eyes and the clear clever brain, a vigorous product of the nineteenth century, had called to her and claimed her; she had shut her dreams in her heart and had gone to him with the unerring instinct of a homing bird. But why? He was so different! Here was Baireuth, for example—he was taking it quite as a matter of course, an intellectual interest, a musical curiosity; and she—

"Look!" she said, with bated breath; "there it is!"

He looked at her instead.

"Oh, Max! how can you? Look!" and she pointed to the theatre that appeared, a small flat round, at the top of the hill they were ascending.

"Dorothy! Dorothy! there it is," called her chaperon, who was walking ahead with the rest of the party.

"Oh, I see it!" Dorothy's voice was vibrant.

"It is remarkable," Max said, "how earnestness of purpose makes an atmosphere; really one feels lifted into a more reverent attitude towards life." (Ah! now he was satisfactory!) "See that old man over there, with the music score under his arm—I believe he spent his last cent to come here; and those women—stout and middle-aged—how young and eager they seem! I am glad we came."

"Oh, thank you, Max! I thought you did not care."

"Sweetheart, because a man is not the torrid zone, don't press him into the frigid."

"What is that?" and Dorothy's voice rose to the thrill of coming joy.

"That, miss," volunteered a lank, sandy-haired man behind her, "is the horn to call the audience together. It blows three times, and if you aren't there at the last blow, you can't get in—they lock the doors."

He spoke to her as though it were quite natural that in a common cause, bound towards a common goal, there should be a sense of brotherhood.

"Oh, thank you. Hurry, Max; hurry! do not let us be late."

When they entered the theatre Dorothy had a pang of disappointment. This barren, barnlike place the arena for the great dramas of the master! The Mecca she had longed and waited for! Devoid of all ornament and symmetry, nothing could be more puritanically severe than the rows and rows of seats before the sombre curtain.

"Wait, sweetheart," Max whispered, "you won't be disappointed soon."

"How did you know I was disappointed?"

"How do I know many things?"

He was not a hero, but undoubtedly he was sometimes very delicious. As they spoke, the lights went down, and Dorothy realized the artistic merit of the theatre's barrenness. The darkness was the genius of the place. It felt like a liv-

ing power, subduing, silencing. The murmur of voices was stilled, the restless shuffling ceased, and that vast audience sat in expectant hush as the first notes of the orchestra rose and swelled into fullness of harmony.

Instinctively, Dorothy's little hand slipped into that of Max, which—by some strange chance—was not far to find. The knowledge of all the world locked out, the knowledge that no belated comer could open the doors—where loomed in the dusk inexorable porters—gave a sense of peace and remoteness which was the climax to Dorothy's delight. Slowly the curtain rose, and her quick intellect perceived, what she had only felt before, why all the theatre should be dark and still. It is the crowning touch of dramatic effect, and makes one a very part of the unfolding drama.

The opera was *Die Götterdämmerung*. Brünnhilde stood upon her fire-guarded mountain height and bade farewell to her hero. Dorothy's heart expanded with that sense of relief which expression brings, be it our own expression or some consummate interpretation which expresses for us. In Brünnhilde she felt herself expressed. Too little tribute has been paid to the character of Brünnhilde as a revelation of woman—that wondrous blending of supreme surrender and immortal maidenhood—she thought.

"Shakspeare does not begin to understand woman as Wagner does." She could not resist that one whisper to Max.

"Sh!" said a man behind her; and Dorothy was glad of the darkness.

Max was interested in the opera; he had a good knowledge of music, an intelligent interest in all art; and although by no means an enthusiastic admirer of Wagner, he recognized that he was a master, that he had conquered even his enemies, and was to be approached and considered with a reverent and open mind. He had determined to make an intellectual study of this first performance he had seen in the proper setting; but he found himself studying, instead, the sensitive face beside him, which the darkness veiled, but did not hide. The color coming and going, the parted scarlet lips, the beautiful eyes which translated the music into their common language, seemed to him, just then, more worth while than the passing scenes upon

the stage. What a child she was! How eager and unworldly, with all her intellect! How full of the glow of her young enthusiasm!

The opera went on. Siegfried said his lingering good-by; his call was heard echoing in the distance; Brünnhilde was alone; the curtain fell, and rose again at once upon King Gunther's hall. Then came that picture of mediæval life—the old castle; the coming of the hero; the meeting; the pledging of friendship; and the blood-covenant.

Max smiled as he watched the play upon the lovely face beside him; but the smile had no trace of criticism nor intolerance. To his practical sense the blood-covenant had a strong touch of the ridiculous. Both as a present representation and a realization of past methods among men it tried him. How absurd to see two full-grown men—the one supposedly a hero—standing before witnesses, each plunging a sword into his own right arm, mingling the blood in a cup of wine and drinking it as an eternal pledge!

But to Dorothy! Well, what was it to Dorothy? Why did her face glow with such an inner radiance that Max was quite content to leave the study of Wagner for some future day, and found himself longing for the curtain to fall, that the opus of his own life might have another act?

When the doors were thrown open, the hushed audience thronged forth into fresh air and speech. In front of the theatre was a large square, and here people gathered, full of comment and chatter, or walked down the board walk at the back of the theatre towards the grove of trees. Max and Dorothy, by common impulse, followed the walk, left it, and climbing down the hill-side, found a shaded nook among the lindens; he spread his overcoat upon the ground and made a place for her, then threw himself beside her, and taking off his hat, looked up at her with smiling eyes.

He saw at once that there was something new in her face; it was rosy with a sweet shyness.

"Max—"

"Yes, dear."

"That is what I want—it is so much more than any engagement-ring *could* be. Will you give me your penknife—and—will you do it?" Her voice faltered like a child's.

"Sweetheart, what *do* you mean? Do what?"

"Let us have a blood-covenant, Max, here—a little one; it will prove so much."

Then Max did a thing altogether natural to man: he put back his head and laughed—a frank, kindly laugh. "My sweet child," he said, "we live in the nineteenth century; we are long past such nonsense. I want my love to be a strong woman—not a sentimentalist. Don't look like that, Dorothy! You know I know what you are; but I want to save you from the rocks that silly women are wrecked upon."

"Thank you, Max."

He looked up quickly to determine just what her tone might mean. There was a proud turn to her head, a sudden veiling, which gave her for him an exquisite charm. He remembered this afterwards; at the time he did not analyze it. He was vaguely conscious of a psychic remoteness; but before he had time to realize a shadow had fallen, she reassured him by saying, quite naturally,

"Wagner is the only man who has co-ordinated the arts, and it makes him intellectually most interesting: do you not think so?"

"Indeed, yes; and gives him a power which is immeasurable."

"Almost all the arts," she continued—"music, painting—for his scenes are living pictures which stay in the memory—and the drama. He is a much greater dramatist than one realizes at first—because one forgets everything in the music. As I said to you, when that man hushed me so peremptorily, Shakspeare has never drawn one woman with the human livingness of Wagner's heroines—and with her soul."

"My dear Dorothy! Think of Portia, and Beatrice, and Rosalind—"

"I have thought of them."

"Well, I don't know," Max said, reflectively.

"Of course you don't: you are not a woman." Dorothy rose.

"Dorothy! you are not going back yet? What is it?"

"Oh, nothing! I have just thought how impolite we are to Mrs. Floyd."

"Bother Mrs. Floyd! How can you remember her? Do stay a little longer."

"No; we really must go back;" and she walked on, talking of Wagner.

Max was roused to mental effort, which stimulated him. How well she talked! He found himself watching with a pleasant excitement the play of her words and the turn of her thought; in so doing he lost sight, for the moment, of her heart; but when they joined the chaperon, he saw that also!

Dorothy had been hurt, and had covered her retreat by manoeuvres of bright speech to call off his attention from herself. Like a woman, she had talked her best when pricked by pride. When they reached the group, who were leisurely eating ices, and were drawn at once into general conversation, reaction came; the strain of pretence told upon her; she longed to put her head down upon the little iron table before her and burst into a torrent of relieving tears. Max saw the sudden change of mood, and was baffled by it; he searched for the old electric current between them, but found it not; her eyes were veiled when he sought them, and her sensitive mouth had no responsive lines to the covert appeals he made in words that she would understand amid the general talk, and in little ways a woman knows. They seemed more divided, sitting two feet apart in this small circle, than they had often seemed when a continent separated them.

Max grew impatient. Was ever *en-tr'acte* so long? Why did it not end? Let him but whisper one word in her ear in the darkness, let him but once find her hand under the sway of the music, and by a subtle current warm her back to life—and all would be right again.

He began seeking in his mind for the cause of this withdrawal. He was of that order of men who are sensitive enough to feel results, but yet not quite sensitive enough to divine the cause. That was to come, perchance, after close contact with Dorothy's illumining influence, as to her would come the saner balance and the surer poise—else it would be no true marriage. He welcomed the horn which called them back, with an eager haste; but, to his dismay, he found himself seated between Mrs. Floyd and Carrie Reinhart.

Dorothy had an imperious way of accomplishing her purposes. Max could usually controvert it, if on his guard; but, taking for granted the natural order of things, he went into his place with Mrs.

Floyd—having walked back to the theatre with her—expecting Dorothy to follow. Instead, Carrie Reinhart did as she was bid and walked into Dorothy's vacant place: then came Jack Cassidy. Dorothy sat next to Mr. Floyd, with whom she was a great favorite, and who took her charming conclusion—that she would sit by him this time—as a boon granted for gratitude. He had brought her to Baireuth, and it seemed but natural that she should give him the enjoyment of her pleasure.

Max felt as if he must rise and protest aloud against his fate; but he talked on with Mrs. Floyd, until the lights went down. Then he challenged his memory. What was it? What had brought this dearth upon his hour? He had been often conscious of a resolution to mature and curb the exuberance of Dorothy's nature, given to his keeping; but now he missed it; he felt suddenly like a man from whom the sunlight has been withdrawn when he was carelessly basking in it. The face of nature had changed for him. Could he, the strong man—who would have laughed awhile ago at shadings given from without—be conscious of a chill, a sense of desolation, simply because a presence had been withdrawn from his side? It was absurd; yet, argue against it as he might, the fact remained. How different Wagner had seemed, in the last act, with Dorothy's glowing self beside him! He recalled how the little hand had slipped into his, and the sweet wonder on the face as the music unfolded—and—yes, that was it!—he remembered!—the blood-covenant!—of course. It all comes back to him now—her romantic folly, his laugh, and her quick plunging into brilliant argument, which had absorbed him and turned his attention from herself. How proud and clever she is—and yet withal what a foolish child! Stay! was it folly? Are things not relative—and dependent upon their source? What may be curiosity in the petty man is investigation in the scientist. What is sentimentalism in the empty-headed may be symbolism of the highest to the idealist. And between the sentimentalist and the true idealist there is as much difference as there is between the glinting of tinsel and the glory of sunshine. Poor child! she had been reaching after an expression of the ideal in material, visible form. What was that but the history of the human race in epitome?

Had not mankind cried out after the Logos—made audible, made visible—since the world began? As the hour passed, his heart championed her cause against his traditions. A wider apprehension came to him of natures different from his own. Foolishness was, after all, largely a point of view, and, like crime upon intent, was dependent upon the motive behind it.

With this new apprehension of her, he looked up and saw her. She was leaning eagerly forward, with clasped hands, her eyes riveted upon the stage; even in the darkness he could see that she was very pale, and that two tears were rolling slowly down her cheeks. A yearning tenderness overswept his heart; he longed to rise and gather her close, to comfort and soothe her in the face of all the world. Dear heart! that he had laughed at her—when she had merely wanted, in a simple, primitive way, what all the world has wanted from the beginning. And he had quoted the nineteenth century to her—dullard that he was! Could he not see that she was greater than a condition, and had that immortal simplicity, defying all ages, which belongs to Homer and the Vedic hymns? She should have her blood-covenant. It was only the pettiness of his own mind which had belittled the idea from a sense of humor.

Dorothy had come into the theatre her heart fierce with bitterness—she had made an overture to her love, and he had *laughed*! As she took her seat away from him she felt that she hated him. He did not understand her; he classed her with those silly girls who press flowers and wear locks of hair. The revelation of a great idea had come to her—the desire for a symbol, holy, uniting. And he had dared to laugh! The penknife? No, that was scarcely romantic, it might be even funny,—but who could stay to think of petty details in a sacrament? She remembered, once, in a poor country church, she had drunk the eucharistic wine out of a heavy glass mug. It had not touched the solemnity; in a way, it had seemed to add to it. If symbolism were not to be at all—that was another thing; but there would be the engagement-ring—he had told her it should be beautiful, a fitting symbol of her love—and the wedding-ring, which the wedding service called “the symbol of

an endless bond." No one thought these foolish—simply because society endorsed them and conventionality approved. Yes, she hated him; he was crowded down into narrow grooves—and she had sworn to mate a hero!

But the curtain rose, and in spite of the bitterness in her heart she found herself following the story upon the stage.

Then rang out that heart-searching cry from Brünnhilde, "Betrayed! betrayed!"

A shock vibrated through Dorothy from head to foot. And Siegfried was a hero! Softly, through the bitterness, the anger that had held her, there stole a sense of buoyant gratefulness. She would never know that cry! Max might not be a hero, but his love was sure—as sure as the foundations of the earth. Ah! surer, for it was immortal, and would last when the firmament was rolled together like a scroll. No potion could touch his brain—it was too clear; no confusion, no stratagem, could drive her from her place in that true heart. The bitterness began to ebb, and in its place a sweet reasonableness rose. It is true he had laughed, but not unkindly; as she recalled it now, in her softer mood, there had been a certain tenderness in it. What had it been, and what had his words been, but a warning born of his love—a warning to guard her from danger—the danger of taking outward things for the real? And she had punished him so severely for that moment's misunderstanding. She would not stay with him when he asked her; she made no response to his courteous overtures before the others; and the hurt surprise on his face when he found that she had left her seat beside him haunted her.

And now Siegfried is swearing on the spear that he does not know Brünnhilde. And where is chivalry? Even if the poison in his veins has made him forget her—and blotted out their love—she is a woman in sore anguish, and Siegfried is ruthless and wantonly cruel in his manner of denying and defying her, to vindicate himself. Dorothy remembers,

once, when some one had accused Max falsely, the measureless pity that he had shown for the man's perfidy, calling it blindness.

Ah! after all, it does not lie in outward things. It is not the aureole that makes the saint, not the externals that make the hero. As that wonderful music soars and rises to its divine revelation, the story seems to shrivel away into nothingness—even her own story grows small—before the universal revelation of beauty, and her soul seems to stand in a larger place. She held her breath when the curtain fell, as if she would hold the spell; then came a rush of joy—she would be near Max again! At the door they met, and each knew that the shadow had been lifted. Without a word they went down the path, and found the same place among the lindens.

"Dorothy—"

"Max!" she interrupted him, "let me speak first, please. I see—I understand. You are right. I must not be carried away by externals, by effects. The consciousness is the real having. You were right. The idea of the blood-covenant is too great to be held by form; forms were for those who could not grasp the spirit;—we are beyond them. I was foolish."

"My darling," he answered, "my wise darling, that is true; but you were not foolish—forgive me that I laughed. I, too, have been learning something this last hour. Your thought was, at base, the motive from which poetry comes. I understand better now. Will you forgive me?"

The tremulous shadows of the lindens fell upon her face. His heart rejoiced in her beauty. "You shall have the blood-covenant, sweetheart, if it would please you—with us it will not be foolish. Do you want it?"

He took her hand in his firm grasp—ah! they had been parted so long! Her blood leaped to his touch, thrilled to her finger-tips. She lifted her eyes, and their souls met.

"I have had it," she said.